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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study designed to assess the types of requirements used to prepare elementary preservice regular class teachers for education of the handicapped surveyed 102 schools granting a baccalaureate degree in elementary education and accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. Most accredited programs either had requirements or are planning to implement requirements for training regular class elementary teachers for work with the handicapped. Results indicated that a variety of special education courses and a combination of requirements are used to prepare regular classroom teachers for educating exceptional children. A "survey" class and/or "mainstreaming" course are the two most widely required special education classes. Additionally, most schools infuse special education information into required regular education classes. Experience with exceptional children in a special education setting was not found to be a widely used requirement in these teacher preparation programs. Requirements were also not found to be different or specific to public or private institutions or related to the population size of the schools. (Author/CL)

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Requirements for Preparing Regular Class Elementary Teachers for Education of Exceptional Children

Paper Presented at the Seventh Annual Conference of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children

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Abstract

This research project was a descriptive study designed to assess the types of requirements used to prepare elementary preservice regular class teachers for education of the handicapped. The schools were randomly selected and all were NCATE accredited schools granting a baccalaureate degree in elementary education. Most accredited programs either have requirements or are planning to implement requirements for training regular class elementary teachers for work with the handicapped. Results indicated that different special education courses and combinations of requirements are used to prepare regular classroom teachers for educating exceptional children. A "survey" class and/or "mainstreaming" course are the two most widely required special education classes. Additionally, most schools infuse special education information into required regular education classes. Experience with exceptional children in a special education setting was not found to be a widely used requirement in these teacher preparation programs. Requirements were also not found to be different or specific to public or private institutions or relative to the population size of the schools. Suggestions for future research in this area are provided.

Several years have passed since educators began to question the efficacy of educating exceptional children in separate special classrooms (Anderson, Martinez, and Rich, 1980; Dunn, 1968; Strain and Kerr, 1981). As a result of these concerns and recent legislation (Kirk and Gallagher, 1979), more handicapped children are now being educated within regular classrooms.

Although the education of exceptional children in regular classes directly affects teachers, administrators, and children at the district and local levels, the practice of mainstreaming has also affected teacher training programs in universities and colleges. For example, some states require that regular class teachers receive some preparation in this area in order to obtain state teacher certification (Ganschow, Weber, and Davis, 1984; Smith and Schindler, 1980; Vacc, 1978). Additionally, teacher preparation programs have been affected through the Dean's Grant Projects as well as by the special education standard recently adopted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

According to Scannell (1982), Dean's Grant Projects have resulted in improvements in teacher preparation programs relative to the training of regular class teachers for education of the handicapped. The recently adopted NCATE special education standard requires that all schools accredited during or after the 1982-83 school year have requirements for preparing regular classs teachers for education of exceptional children (Standards, 1982). According to Olsen (1979), approximately 85% of our educational personnel are prepared through programs accredited by NCATE, which suggests that the implementation of the special education standard now affects most educators who complete a teacher training program.

Since the preparation of regular class teachers for education of exceptional children has been mandated for teacher certification in some states, as well as for accreditation in higher education institutions, many

schools have implemented requirements for preparing regular class teachers for education of the handicapped. Determining types of special education requirements used to prepare regular class teachers will provide additional information relative to how various certification and accreditation standards are addressed, as well as to provide additional information to researchers concerned with evaluating the type of training that prospective regular class teachers receive in this area.

Method

The population used in this study was all higher education institutions granting a baccalaureate degree in elementary education and whose elementary education programs were accredited by NCATE. At the time of this study, according to the most recent edition of the list of accredited programs (1983), 510 schools and programs comprised the total population.

Procedure

A 20% sample was randomly selected from this population (n=102). A survey was developed and sent to all selected schools. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items designed to determine specific types of requirements that each school used to prepare its preservice elementary regular class teachers for education of exceptional children. Development of the survey included a field review by five professionals in the area of teacher training. In addition, two professionals reviewed the instrument after revisions were made following feedback obtained from the initial review. The survey solicited responses to questions in a variety of areas. Table 1 provides the questions addressed in the survey.

Insert Table 1 about here

A cover letter was included with the survey which explained the purpose of the study and instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire. All surveys were sent to the dean of the school of education at the selected schools. Most of the returned surveys (n=88) were completed by the deans or directors of special education or teacher education departments. In addition to tabulating the frequency of use of various requirements, Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficients were obtained between school size (less than 3000, 3001 to 9999; 10,000 or more), type (public or private), and types of requirements, in order to determine relationships betweeen size, type, and use of specific requirements to prepare regular class teachers for education of the handicapped.

Results

Eighty-eight (86.2%) of the questionnaires were returned. One of the schools indicated that they no longer had the appropriate undergraduate program and was dropped from the study. Thus, a total of 87 surveys (85.3%) were used in the data analysis.

Seventy-four (85%) of the schools stated that they had requirements to prepare prospective elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped, while 13 (15%) did not have requirements. Eight of those schools stated that they were planning to implement requirements within their programs. In addition to having the requirements to meet the NCATE special education standard, 61 (82%) and 41 (55%) indicated that the requirements were also for state accreditation and internal requirements, respectively.

With reference to special education courses, 14 (18.9%) stated that they did not require completion of any special education courses by their prospective elementary regular class teachers. The remaining schools (81.1%)

required completion of one or more special education classes within their training programs. Table 2 provides a list of the special education courses and the number and percent of schools that require each course.

Insert Table 2 about here

As shown in Table 2, "Survey of exceptional children" and "Teaching the exceptional child in the regular class" were the two most frequently required courses. An "Assessment" class was required by some schools as well as various combinations of special education coursework.

Also, 10 (13.5%) of the schools stated that infusion of special education information into regular education courses was the only required form of preparation. Four (5.4%) of the schools infused information and required experience with the handicapped in a special education setting. Twenty-five (33.7%) of the schools infused information and required one of the special education classes, 10 (13.5%) required two of the special classes and infused information, and 18 (24.3%) required one or more special education courses as well as experience with exceptional children in a special education setting. Fifteen (20%) of the schools required completion of one special education course as the only form of preparation used to train prospective elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped.

Considering various combinations of requirements, 35 (47.2%) required the survey course and 32 (43.2%) required the teaching the exceptional child course. Ten (13.5%) required the assessment class and 6 (8.1%) required other courses in addition to or instead of these three special education classes. Also, 50 (67.5%) indicated that they infused material into required regular education courses and 22 (29.7%) required experience with the handicapped in a special education setting. In addition, 17 (22.9%) of the

respondents stated that their prospective elementary regular class teachers completed a required project with one or more handicapped student(s) in a regular classroom.

In reference to the special education field work, 4 (18.1%) indicated that the students worked 12 to 18 weeks in a special class, 9 (40.9%) required 4 to 12 weeks, and in 5 (22.7%) of the schools the students work less than 4 weeks in a special classroom. Also, 17 (77.2%) of the schools that required special class experience also required a seminar course that occurred in conjunction with the field work.

The results from all correlations obtained between type and size of the schools and types of requirements within training programs were found to be non-significant ($r > .5$). With reference to the schools that did not have specific requirements for training prospective elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped, 8 (61.5%) of those 13 schools stated that requirements would be implemented. Sixty-three percent planned to require a "mainstreaming" course, 25% planned to require a survey course, 25% an assessment class, 50% planned to infuse special education information into required regular education classes, and 13% (one school) planned to require field experience with the handicapped.

Discussion

Teacher training programs which prepare most of our nations educators use some different approaches or combination of approaches to meet certification and accreditation standards for preparing prospective elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped. Although not all schools had requirements for preparing prospective elementary teachers for mainstreaming, approximately 95% of the schools either had requirements or were planning to implement requirements. Also, most schools

used completion of one or more special education courses as requirements to prepare prospective teachers, with approximately 60% requiring completion of one special education course. Additionally, if special education coursework was required, a survey class and/or a mainstreaming course was required by almost all schools.

Infusion of information into required education classes was also found to be a widely used form of intervention. Approximately two-thirds of the schools infused special education information into required education classes. This finding is consistent with suggestions provided by members associated with the Dean's Grant Projects who wrote that the preparation of regular class teachers for education of the handicapped may be best accomplished through modifications of the total curriculum; modifications which include infusion of special education information into the teacher education curriculum (Scannell, 1982). Additionally, approximately one-half of the NCATE accredited programs infused special education information into required regular education classes in addition to completion of one or more special education courses. Most schools that infused information incorporated special education content into required psychology classes and/or the elementary "methods" courses.

Although most schools acknowledged that their prospective teachers had contact with exceptional children during their regular classroom field work, less than one-fourth required completion of a project with the handicapped during their field work. Also, less than one-third of the schools required special education classroom experience. Thus, although completion of a special education course and/or infusion of special education information into regular education classes are widely used requirements for preparing regular class teachers for education of the handicapped, most schools do not require experience with exceptional children in a special

education setting. However, if experience in a special education setting is required, most schools also have their students complete a seminar class that occurs in conjunction with the field work.

With reference to the schools that did not have requirements but planned to implement them, over half of the schools planned to infuse special education information into required regular education classes and most schools planned to require completion of a mainstreaming course. Experience with the handicapped in a special education setting was not being considered by most schools planning to implement requirements.

Although several different approaches or combinations of approaches for preparing regular class teachers for educating exceptional children have been identified, the low correlations between types of requirements and selected school characteristics (i.e., size, type) suggest that no form of preparation is specific to larger or smaller populated schools or public and private schools. Thus, specific requirements for preparing elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped can not be inferred by the size or type of school a prospective teacher attends.

Since this was a descriptive study, results must be interpreted within this limitation. Only "types" of requirements were assessed and, although similar titles for special education classes were used, this does not imply similar content or quality. Additionally, the methods for infusion and the kind and amount of special education information incorporated into regular education classes was not investigated; only whether schools used this type of approach.

Implications

Schools which prepare most of our nations educators do have requirements for preparing elementary regular class teachers for education of

the handicapped. Based upon the information gathered in this study, several research related issues may be considered. First, since some schools require completion of either one special education course or infuse special education information into regular education classes as the only form of preparation, research is needed to better determine whether each of these approaches provide sufficient training. Second, many schools infuse information into regular education classes, in addition to requiring completion of one special education course. Future research is also needed to determine if this combination provides adequate training for preparing regular class teachers for education of the handicapped. Third, most schools do not require experience with exceptional children in a special education setting or completion of projects with handicapped children in regular classes. Further studies related to the benefits of these approaches in training regular educators for mainstreaming should also be undertaken to better determine if more schools should implement these types of requirements. Fourth, as future research considers the quality of the preparation of regular class teachers for education of the handicapped, the specific combinations of approaches (i.e., infusion, special education coursework, experience with exceptional children) that have been identified should be considered; rather than the investigation of isolated approaches. Suggestions for conducting research in this area include: 1) follow-up studies of program graduates which includes rating their own competence in working with exceptional children; 2) public school supervisor evaluations of the students' performance relative to working with the handicapped in the regular class; or, 3) a combination of these two approaches which will allow researchers to compare results from different sources.

Table 1

Specific areas assessed within
teacher training programs*

1. Do you presently have requirements for preparing preservice elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped?

2. In addition to NCATE accreditation, are your requirements also for state accreditation and/or internal requirements?

3. Which special education courses do you require within your training program?

4. Which required regular education courses do you infuse special education information?

5. Do you require experience with exceptional children in a special education setting?

6. If special class experience is required, how much time is spent working with the handicapped (over 18 weeks; 12-18 weeks; 4-12 weeks; less than 4 weeks)?

7. Does a required Seminar class occur in conjunction with the required special education field work?

8. Do your students have a required project that they complete with one or more handicapped student(s) in the regular classroom?

9. If you do not presently have requirements for preparing elementary regular class teachers for education of the handicapped do you have immediate plans to implement requirements?

10. If you plan to implement requirements, what do you plan to include in your training program (special education courses; experience with the handicapped; infusion of special education information)?

*Questions represent general areas assessed and do not reflect, in detail, the complete format of the survey. The actual survey included specific items under each question for respondents to address (i.e., specific course titles, amount of special class experience, etc.).

Table 2

Special education courses required within teacher preparation programs*

		%	n
1.	Required only "Survey of Exceptional Children"	29.7	22
2.	Required only "Teaching the Exceptional Child in the Regular Class"	24.3	18
3.	Required only "Assessment of Exceptional Children"	2.7	2
4.	Required both the Teaching the Exceptional Child course and Survey class	6.7	5
5.	Required an Assessment class and Teaching the Exceptional Child course	1.3	1
6.	Required all three courses	8.1	6
7.	Required two or more of these courses plus other special education classes	2.7	2
8.	Do not require any of these courses but do require other special education classes	5.4	4
9.	Do not require completion of any special education classes	18.9	14

*Column total for "percent of programs" does not equal 100% due to rounding

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